

H Constantine

advancing from strength to strength, conscious of its increasing powers and of the benevolent neutrality of Diocletian. Christians who took office were relieved from the necessity of offering incense or presiding at the games. The State looked the other way ; the Church was inclined to let them off with the infliction of some nominal penance. Nor was there much difficulty about service in the army. Probably few enlisted in the legions after they had become Christians ; against this the Church set her face. But she permitted the converted soldier to remain true to his military oath, for she did not wish to become embroiled with the State. In a word, there was deep religious peace, at any rate in Diocletian's special sphere of influence, Asia, Egypt, and Syria.

^ It is to be remembered, however, that there were four rulers, men of very different characters and each, therefore, certain to regard Christianity from a different standpoint. Thus there might be religious peace in Asia and persecution in the West, as, indeed, there was — partial and spasmodic, but still persecution. Maximian was cruel and ambitious, an able soldier of the hard Roman type, no respecter of persons, and careless of human life. Very few modern historians have accepted the story of the massacre of the Theban Legion at Agauna, near Lake Lemane, for refusal to offer sacrifice and take the oath to the Emperor. According to the legend, the legion was twice decimated and then cut to pieces. But it is impossible to believe that there could have been a legion or even a company of troops from Thebes in